

North Downs Way

NATIONAL TRAIL



Lost Landscapes

HERITAGE TRAIL



A shrunken hamlet, some of the rarest wild flowers in Britain and a tomb in the middle of a large woodland. These are just some of the highlights on this Lost Landscapes Heritage Trail, a new circular walk along the North Downs Way.

Cuxton

The main trail explores the parish of Cuxton, a place of ancient woodlands and historic settlements, with spectacular views over the Medway and a network of dry valleys. Cuxton's heritage really does span the whole of human history - from a Stone Age axe factory to the building of the Medway Bridge. If you wish, you can extend the trail by taking the 'Darnley diversion' into the Cobham Estate.



The main text of the booklet consists of detailed directions and information on points of interest along the trail. The back pages of the booklet cover other important local heritage themes.

The Lost Landscapes project

With grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund (through the Local Heritage Initiative) and the Rail Link Countryside Initiative, the Lost Landscapes project, organised by the North Downs Way National Trail, has been taking place in six communities along the North Downs. People in these communities have been looking into the heritage and history of their area and discovering what it is that makes their parishes special. Their contributions are the backbone of this booklet.

The Cuxton Heritage Trail has been carefully chosen to take in the best of the heritage features of the area. As you walk you will find that the history has been brought back to life by the wonderful recollections and memories of local people.

Enjoy your journey back in time!

About the trail...

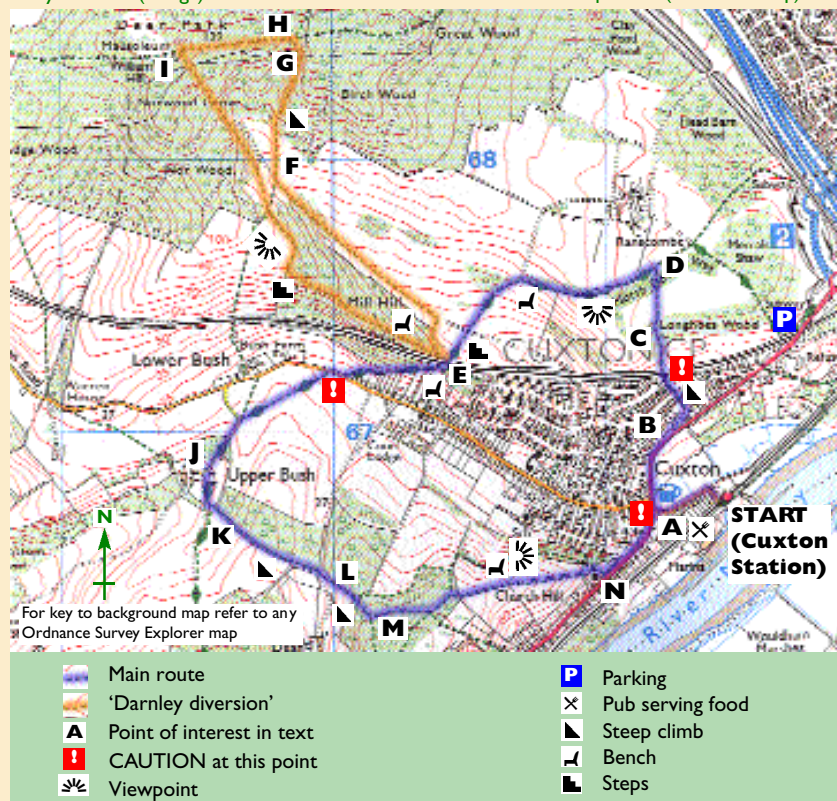
Distances

Main route (purple) - 3.7 miles

'Darnley diversion' (orange) - 2.2 miles

Terrain

Unmade tracks through fields and woods. Muddy at times. Some steep climbs (marked on map).



The map above shows the trail routes, and the booklet contains detailed written directions in numbered steps, but you may find it useful to take an Ordnance Survey map for this area - Explorer no. 148 or Landranger no. 178.

Getting to Cuxton

By train - there is a station in Cuxton, which is also the start point of the trail. The station is on the Medway Valley line between Strood and Paddock Wood. For train times telephone 08457 484950.

By car - take the A228 from junction 2 of the M2 or junction 4 of the M20. The A228 will take you into the centre of Cuxton. Look for a crossroads at the White Hart pub and turn down Station Road. Parking: on street along Station Road, at the White Hart pub (please give them your custom) or car park at top of Sundridge Hill.

By bus - the 151 service goes through Cuxton. There is a bus stop by the White Hart pub (point A on the trail).

Be safe, be prepared

Please take care when walking on roads (use pavement if available or keep to the right) and crossing roads and railways. Points where caution should be exercised are highlighted on the map and in the text. Always wear suitable clothing and footwear. Allow plenty of time for your walk - about an hour for every 2 miles (more for elderly or inexperienced walkers). Always keep to the countryside code (see back of booklet).

From start to point A

1. Start at Cuxton station. Walk up Station Road, away from the station and Cuxton Marina. The road bends to the left. Follow it until you come to a T junction with the main road (A228), with the White Hart pub on your left.

POINT A - WHITE HART PUB Roman beginnings and wartime memories

The White Hart pub was built in 1860. During construction, considerable finds of Roman pottery were made. The finds are now lost but it is recorded that one of the vessels had the name of the potter, Maternus, stamped on it. This is one of many pieces of evidence for substantial Roman occupation in this part of the parish. We'll find out more about that on our return to the village at the end of the walk.

The Lost Landscapes project received a contribution that included a personal account of the White Hart written by Lilian Bennett, who first went to live at the pub in 1914. She recalled how this part of the village looked then:

"At that time the 'White Hart' grounds stretched right across to the station on one side, and almost to the Vicarage drive on Church Hill. There was not a house in sight, but the marsh today is almost the same as it was then... Then there were the hops, all up one side of the village street (Bush Road) and extending past the school..."

Lilian recorded memories from both World Wars...

From WWI:

"Suddenly 'Big Lizzie' (the gun on the other side of the river) pounded away. The whole pub shook... As we looked out of the window we saw a Zeppelin which my aunt said was probably going towards London."

From WWII:

"I decided to go to the woods to get some blackberries, and while there the air raid warning sounded. A huge black bomber swooped overhead, with spidfires after it... I cowered in the hedge, bullets were flying everywhere... In a few minutes it was all over... I decided to carry on picking blackberries and about 5 o'clock, headed for home. When I got to the top of Church Hill, I stopped in amazement. Outside the pub were crowds of people. I raced down the hill - I thought the pub had been hit. Not so. What had been

hit, or merely grazed, was Court Lodge, home of Shorts drawing offices [Shorts was an aircraft manufacturer based in the area]... The staff had left in a body and were now gathered outside the White Hart expecting to be let in and provided with brandy!"

These extracts are taken from *Cuxton Remembered* by Lilian Bennett.

From point A to point B

2. At the end of Station Road, turn right then use the crossing place to cross the main road. CAUTION: This is a very busy road, please take care.

3. Having crossed the road, turn right, cross Bush Road and walk past the petrol station. You are now on Sundridge Hill. Continue until you reach a left hand turn called Pilgrims Way. Stop here (do not turn left yet).

POINT B - MEDWAY VALLEY

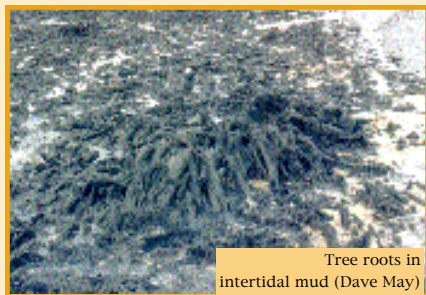
A view of history spanning over 1400 years

Look to your right over the Medway Valley, towards the Medway bridge. When it was built in 1963, this bridge was the longest of its type in the world. Local resident Dave May took this photograph of the bridge under construction.

Dave has told us about his investigations of the river at low tide, which revealed the presence of trees stumps in the intertidal mud:

"The ancient tree roots started about mid way between the bridge and the brickworks creek. These tree roots are only exposed on spring tides... on a layer of what appears to be peat... Most of the roots are well decomposed but a few still have quite hard parts." (Please note - it is very dangerous to walk in the river channel.)





Tree roots in intertidal mud (Dave May)

The valley floor to your right was the site of the nineteenth century Cuxton brickworks which operated from the 1850s until the 1970s. This was a major employer in the village and its bricks were sent up the River Medway on barges to London where they were used in prestigious buildings such as the British Museum.

Now we take a big leap back in time, into the Early Middle Ages, when a Saxon warrior was buried on the valley slopes near here. The grave was discovered in 1859 by workmen digging the railway. Buried with the body were grave goods - weapons, a bronze buckle, an urn and a heavy javelin known as an angon. The finds are in the British Museum and the skeleton is in the collection of the Royal College of Surgeons.

In 1998, an Anglo-Saxon cemetery was found in the same part of the valley, during excavations prior to Channel Tunnel Rail Link construction. Thirty-six burials and two cremations were found. The cremation urns were dated to between 550 and 650 AD. A fantastic array of grave goods was found, including spearheads, knives, keys, rings, coins and two purses.

From point B to point C

4. Turn left into Pilgrims Way. CAUTION: There is no pavement past this point.

5. Just before the turning for Petchart Close, turn left onto a public footpath. Follow the path steeply uphill, until you reach a level crossing. CAUTION: Take care on this crossing - stop, look both ways and listen carefully before crossing.

6. Having crossed the railway, keep straight on, uphill, into woodland.

POINT C - LONGHOES WOOD First steps into the ancient woodland

This is Longhoses Wood, the first of a number of ancient woodlands on this walk. Its unusual name comes from the Old English *lang hoh*, meaning long spur of land. See the section on 'Special Woodlands' (page 14) for more information.

From Point C to point D

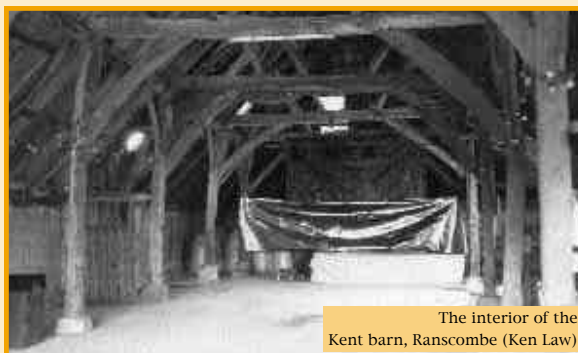
7. Walk through the woodland, keeping straight on and reach the edge of the wood, where the path carries on ahead, across an arable field.

8. At the far side of the field, stop at a marked T junction of paths.

POINT D - RANSCOMBE FARM A farm in a time warp

You may be aware that you are now walking in Ranscombe Farm, a farm which gives us a glimpse into an era before modern agriculture. Of particular importance are fields that have remained relatively unaffected by intensive farming, and become home to some exceptionally rare plants. Ranscombe is now managed by Plantlife International and a tenant farmer to conserve its unique botanical treasures.

The buildings you can see across the fields form the main homestead of Ranscombe, consisting of a traditional Kent barn, seven cottages and the farmhouse, built around the turn of the century. The original farmhouse dated from at least the 17th century. There is no public access to this area, but walkers are



The interior of the Kent barn, Ranscombe (Ken Law)

welcome to explore the rest of the farm via the network of marked paths:

"Ranscombe Farm is a combined nature reserve and working farm occupying 560 acres (227 hectares)... With over 10 km of footpaths, it offers a great opportunity to explore a classic landscape of woodland, arable fields and grassland with a rich diversity of wildlife. Its natural features have changed remarkably little since the 18th century..."
Ranscombe Farm Reserve - leaflet produced by Plantlife International.

The Damley Diversion section of this walk takes you through some of the most interesting areas of Ranscombe.

Local resident Ken Law has researched the origins of the name of this farm: "Probably from Old English *hraefn* or *hraem* meaning raven, and *cumb* a valley."

Ken found that the name has gone through many corruptions through the centuries:

First recorded 1199 - *Rainescombe*
In 1200 - *de Rammescambe* or *de Rennescombe*
In 1392 - *de Rammescambe*
In 1769 - *Rantscomb*

Ken also has personal recollections of the farm from WWII:

"On 14th November 1944 a doodlebug [a V1 'flying bomb'] hit an elm tree and exploded above ground causing extensive damage to the farm house and oast. The farmer, Hayley Pye, had a narrow escape. On hearing the missile coming down, he ran from his office, through the house and with Mrs Pye dived into the Morrison shelter, emerging to find his office destroyed."

From Point D to point E

9. Turn left (onto the North Downs Way). Shortly the path bends to the left then right, past a metal field gate. (Here is a good viewpoint over the Medway Valley.)

10. Continue to a kissing gate, go through and walk downhill. Soon after, the path emerges into a large field. Follow the edge of the field, downhill, with woodland to your right. (A lost pathway, which used to cut across this field then continue to Ranscombe farm, is shown on old maps.)

11. Pass a bench on your right and keep straight on at the track junction.

12. Follow the path downhill. It then crosses the large

arable field. (If you look to your right you may see the pointed top of the Damley Mausoleum in the trees. Glimpses of the Mausoleum from a distance were designed to remind you of your mortality.)

13. Keep straight ahead at a marked junction. On reaching the edge of the field, walk through the trees in front of you and up the steps. Stop at the top.

POINT E - MILL HILL WOOD A national treasure

You are standing at the edge of Mill Hill Wood, which is nationally important and protected by law. Much of it is ancient. For more information, see the 'Special Woodlands' section on page 14.

It is said locally that the base of the windmill that gave Mill Hill its name was moved to Cobham and converted into a house. A house like this exists in Cobham but it has been impossible to establish whether it came originally from Cuxton.

If you want to take the Damley diversion, turn right, into the wood and follow directions from step DD1 below

To stay on the main walk, turn left and cross the bridge over the railway. Skip to step 14 on page 8.

The Darnley diversion

From point E to point F

DD1. Walk into the woods and come to a fork in the path. Go right.

DD2. Keep straight on, with the edge of the wood on your right, and emerge back into the arable field.

DD3. Walk past a large tree, keeping it on your left, then turn left at the marker. Stay on this path, through the field, for about 1/4 mile.

DD4. At the edge of the field, keep straight on, back into the wood.

DD5. Walk right through this part of the wood and into another arable field.

POINT F - RARE WILD FLOWER FIELD

Mirror mirror on the wall, who is the rarest of them all?

Blue pimpernel. Night-flowering catchfly. Venus' looking-glass. Some evocative names for some beautiful wild flowers that grow here, but much more than that. These plants are exceptionally rare, making this simple looking field one of the best places to see arable wild flowers in the country.

When agriculture modernised and farmers started to use chemicals to control weeds, the wild plants that had always grown alongside arable crops started to disappear. But Ranscombe Farm escaped much of this change, and here in this field is a sanctuary for these special plants, now national rarities. The corncockle (above, right) is so rare that this is thought to be the only place in the UK it can be seen in the wild.



Arable wild flowers among the wheat crop.

From point F to point G

DD6. Walk diagonally uphill right across the field, and into a large woodland. At an unmarked junction, keep straight on.

DD7. Walk steeply uphill (entering Cobham Parish). As you reach the top, where the path bends to the left, look to your left down the bank for a clump of four yew trees forming a rectangle. To see the remains of the Toe Monument, walk over to these trees. Return to this path to continue the diversion.

POINT G - TOE MONUMENT

The scene of a fatal accident

Sometimes you hear a story and you don't know whether to laugh or cry. The events that led to the building of this ruined monument certainly fall into that category. Edward, 5th Earl of Darnley, was walking around his estate with two companions in February 1835 when they encountered some woodsmen at work. The Earl approached them and, according to an account from a member of his household, said...

"'Now I'll show you how to cut a root in halves,' and took the Woodcutter's Axe and struck hard upon the Root, when the Axe glided off and just caught the little toe of his foot and part of the next thro' his Boot. He started and said 'I have harmed myself, I fear! But it might have been worse and I ought to consider myself fortunate.'"

The Earl clearly didn't take the accident seriously - the next day he wrote...

"'We are all well here, barring that I almost cut off a little toe with an axe yesterday; providentially it is a matter of no consequence, but might have been a serious accident.'"

But in the days before tetanus injections, such an injury was a serious matter. This illness, also known as lock-jaw, set in and a week after the accident, the Earl died, aged 39.

The Earl's widow decided the place where the accident had occurred should be commemorated, and the toe monument was erected - a stone memorial in simple style decorated with the Darnley crest, set among suitably funereal yew trees.

What you see now are just fragments of the monument, some of which bear parts of the crest. Only the brick plinth on which the memorial stood is now intact.

The extracts quoted above are from *Edward, Fifth Earl of Darnley* by Lady Elizabeth Cust and Evelyn Georgiana Pelham (1913).

From point G to point H

DD8. Continue uphill, coming to a marked cross-roads at the top. Turn left and walk into an area of large, very old trees.

POINT H - COBHAM DEER PARK

Land of secretive deer

You are now entering the historic landscape of Cobham Deer Park. The park dates to the fifteenth century and, although the deer herd no longer exists, a few animals are said to remain in wooded corners of the park.

This landscape did not evolve by accident - it was carefully designed as part of the Cobham Estate. As such it is listed on the national Historic Parks and Gardens Register. It is also important for its wildlife. The many large old trees in particular provide habitats for birds, bats, rare insects and fungi, and the park is protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

From point H to point I

DD9. Carry on walking through the deer park. Shortly you will emerge into a clearing with the Darnley Mausoleum at its centre.

POINT I - THE DARNLEY MAUSOLEUM

A powerful symbol of death

Seeing the Darnley Mausoleum for the first time is an experience that most people never forget. To come across such an imposing, unusual building in the middle of a large woodland is bound to make an impression, and the Mausoleum was built to do just that. Designed in the Neo-Classical style by James Wyatt for the 4th Earl of Darnley, it exhibited the highest standards of architecture, engineering and craftsmanship of the time. It was built in 1783 from Portland stone, its cube base surmounted by a pyramid and surrounded by Doric, fluted columns. These forms are designed to symbolise the dignity and finality of death. Of course this building also represented wealth - it cost £9,000, which, in 1783, was a huge sum, equivalent to £1 million today.

Wyatt took his influences from the ancient world, from classical architecture, Judaism and Freemasonry, even finding inspiration in the tomb of Mausolus himself (which is where the word mausoleum comes from). The building he designed is a shining example of the Neo-Classical style and now of international

significance. The Bishop of Rochester, however, did not appreciate these qualities and, it is said, saw the building as un-Christian. He therefore refused to consecrate it on its completion, so the Mausoleum was never used for its intended purpose.



Preliminary investigations for the restoration of the Darnley Mausoleum (CAMS)

The location of the Mausoleum in this woodland was no accident. Eighteenth century landscape design tried to recreate the idealised rural landscapes found in the work of painters such as Poussin and Claude.

Unfortunately this vision has been spoilt by decades of neglect and vandalism, and the building has been at risk of complete ruin.

Local resident Dave May recalls seeing this decline:

"I can remember the Mausoleum having wrought ironwork and a rather attractive orange marble on the pillars... Then vandalism increased towards the late 1960s to early 1970s..."

In 2002 it featured in the BBC TV programme *Restoration*. It didn't progress beyond the first stage, but funding has been raised from other sources and, at the time this booklet was published, structural repairs and cleaning were under way as part of a wider project to restore Cobham Park.

From point I back to point E

DD10. Turn left at a marked junction, before the Mausoleum and walk into the woods, going downhill.

DD11. At an unmarked junction turn left. Come to another unmarked junction and go straight on (over track).

DD12. Continue downhill and come to a staggered junction. Turn right, then immediately left, following yellow tape on trees.

DD13. You will now emerge back into the rare wild flower

field. Walk uphill, diagonally across the field towards a small metal gate in the top corner.

DD14. Go through the gate and walk along the edge of a field with woodland to your left. (Good viewpoint here.)

DD15. The path bends to the right and shortly afterwards turns left into the woods. Go down some steps. At an unmarked junction, go straight on.

DD16. Walk through the woods for about 0.25 miles. Pass a bench on your right, and keep straight on. Keep straight on past two unmarked junctions.

DD17. You will find yourself back at the fork in the path at point DD1. Turn right and walk back to the railway bridge. Cross the bridge to continue the main route.

Damley diversion ends.

From point E to point J

14. Having crossed the bridge over the railway, turn right, on the North Downs Way. Pass the 'Mill Hill Wood' sign and a bench, then keeping straight ahead at a junction.

15. Keep straight on, downhill. Eventually you will reach a second 'Mill Hill Wood' sign and a wooden kissing gate, which you should go through, onto Bush Road. CAUTION: This road is quite busy for a country lane and there is no pavement; please take care.

16. Turn right. After a short distance, take the footpath sign-posted off to the left, on the North Downs Way. (As you cross, look down to your right and you will see the hamlet of Lower Bush, where the local blacksmith used to be based.)

17. Cross the corner of this arable field and emerge onto Upper Bush Road. Turn left, and walk uphill, into Upper Bush. (The small woodland you pass on your right used to be an orchard. The first building you see on your left started life as accommodation for soldiers in WW1.)

POINT J - UPPER BUSH

The hamlet that almost disappeared

As you walk into Upper Bush you will find one of the smallest, quietest and most secluded hamlets in this part of Kent. Compared to the large, busy village of Cuxton, it is tranquil and quite remote. You may find it hard to believe that in the 19th and early 20th

century it was the other way round - this was a busy, bustling place and it was Cuxton that was the smaller, more out-of-the-way settlement.

To prove that this was the case, let's first look at early Ordnance Survey maps of both settlements



You can see that Cuxton was much smaller than it is now and had fewer buildings than Upper Bush, known at that time as Upper Birch.

The hamlet now known as Bush has gone through other name changes, as researched by Ken Law:

1267 - Bererce
1400 - Berese or Beresh
1800 - Birch

The name originally came from the Old English *beresc*, meaning barley stubble field.

Ken also found this list of 'notable residents' living in Bush in Bagshaw's *General History of Kent* from 1847:

William Burr - wheelwright
Robert Clifton - blacksmith
Mary Goodhew - school mistress

Thomas Ratford - shoemaker
William Baker - grocer and (appropriately) baker

This demonstrates how much busier Bush was then. In his book *Cuxton, A Kentish Village*, Derek Church painted a picture of how the hamlet might have looked at this time:

"As we approach from Lower Bush...we would come to the first of the cottages on our left occupied in 1837 by Thomas Goodyer and opposite was the home of William Pemples who ran a market garden. Both houses were surrounded by orchards...Beyond Mr Goodyer's house was a row of three cottages...known as 'Clack Alley'...They were originally one house, the first part of which was built in about 1390 [now called 'Barrow Hill House']...just south of Clack Alley was the wheelright's shop occupied for many years by Mr William Burr...The Green was usually strewn with carts and farm implements which had been brought up to Mr Burr for repair."

The hamlet also had its own chapel. Clearly it was a thriving rural community. What's more, it continued to thrive, and grow. Lilian Bennet recalls that between WWI and WWII Bush was...

"...a much larger place than it is now. It had its own off licence and bakery and many cottages...Bush had many things that Cuxton lacked."
From *Cuxton Remembered* by Lilian Bennett

Derek Church recorded the recollections of someone who lived in Upper Bush at this time:

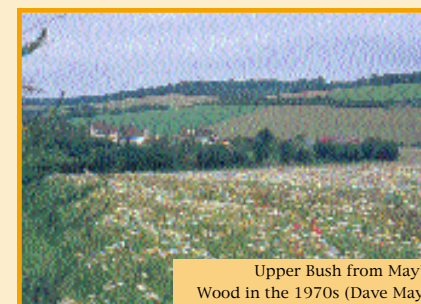
"When Mrs Ablett lived at Upper Bush as a girl it was a very different place. Her father, Mr Henry Baker, kept the off-licence and bakery and there were 22 houses altogether; Cuxton itself, she tells me, had but nine at this time."



'Clack Alley' in 1904
(Ken Law/Derek Church)

So what led to this busy settlement becoming the secluded backwater we see now? The first factor was a change in ownership. Upper Bush had been owned by the Damley family, as part of the Cobham Estate since 1747 (and before that by Lord Romney - see the 'Whorles Place map' section, page 15). In 1949, the Cobham Estate was acquired by the City of Rochester.

The second factor was economic and social change. After WWII, Cuxton expanded, at first due to the local industries and later its growing role as a commuter village. Meanwhile Bush went into decline - facilities were lost and houses fell into disrepair. In 1960 the local council made the decision to demolish most of the hamlet, leaving only five buildings.



Upper Bush from May's
Wood in the 1970s (Dave May)

Ken Law recalls this period with sadness:

"The Corporation bought it...with the intention of making it a rural outlet for the citizens of Rochester. This scheme did not materialise, and the only result has been the pulling down of Bush Farm, a fine example of a 300 year old farmstead and an old chapel built in 1200 AD. An old elm tree, said to be the oldest in the county has also been removed...At the end of 1963 all the families living in Bush except two were re-housed in Cuxton council houses or flats."

Despite all of this, Upper Bush still has a number of notable buildings. Among these are two beautiful 15th century hall houses - 'High Birch', and 'Barrow Hill House'. Both would also have been lost to the bulldozers but for a campaign by local people. They are now listed buildings. Also look out for the 'Old Bakery' and a house called 'Overstrands', which used to be the off-licence. It is because of buildings like these that, perhaps ironically, Upper Bush is now protected as a Conservation Area by the local council.

From point J to point K

18. Walk along the lane, and where it bends to the right, keep straight on, on a rough track on the North Downs Way, past a North Downs Way milestone.

19. Keep straight on, past a timbered house called 'High Birch'. The track becomes a footpath between two hedges.

20. Soon you will reach a fork in the path. Go left (leaving the North Downs Way). Keep straight on, past a wide track to the left. You are now at one end of Bush Valley.

POINT K - BUSH VALLEY The airfields that didn't exist

You probably know that Kent was right at the front-line in the battle for air supremacy in WWII, with its airfields playing a key role. But there were some airfields that never saw a single take-off or landing, or even a real aircraft. These were 'decoy' airfields, and there was one right here, in the valley to your right - Bush Valley.

Ken Law remembers it well: "There was a decoy airfield with two lines of landing lights ... The decoy lights were controlled and powered by a generator in a blockhouse in Longbottom Wood... The intention being to fool the enemy into dropping their bombs there instead of a populated area. Unfortunately it seems it fooled one of our crippled Halifax bombers, which crashed on Baving bank, just short of the decoy strip..."

Mr Godding from Halling, provided details of this crash: the pilot was American and the rest of the crew Canadian; they were returning from a raid on Chemnitz on 6th March 1945.

Also near here was an anti-aircraft gun manned by the Royal Artillery. The gun, plus a searchlight and accommodation for the men was located by the footpath junction where you left the North Downs Way.

From point K to point L

21. Keep straight on, steeply uphill, through a belt of trees at the edge of the field. You will then start to head downhill, into the Dean Valley, reaching a road. (The area behind you

and to your right used to be an orchard known as Roger's Dean Orchard, then a hop garden, sheltered by a lost strip of woodland called Roger's Dean Shaw.)

22. Cross the road. The path continues on the other side, past some metal railings, climbing steeply. Stop about half way up the hill.

POINT L - DEAN FARM Lost hops and houses



Dean Farm in the 1950s (note the hop gardens).

If you look down to your right, you will see the oast houses of Dean Farm, sitting in the Dean Valley. At the far end of the valley is a dis-used chalk quarry (now landscaped), which was mined by Rugby Cement. This is a landscape that has been through some changes in the 20th century. We are lucky to have a visual record of these changes in the form of photographs taken by Ken Law, who grew up on Dean Farm.

The four photographs opposite show the unfortunate demise of the farm cottages.

In fact, when the cottages were demolished, it wasn't the first time that the main dwelling at Dean Farm had been lost - Ken Law's research has revealed that the original farmhouse burnt down in 1850.

He has also made this list of past farmers at Dean Farm:

1763 - Mr John Tomlin (nearby Tomlins Lane is named after him)
1808 - Mr Prentis
1882 - Mr Tuff



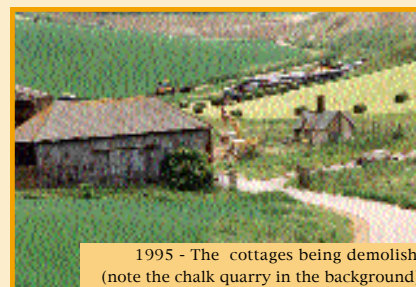
1960s - The farmstead with the cottages intact and still lived in.



1994 - The cottages empty and boarded up with a fence to keep out vandals.



1994 - Burnt out by vandals.



1995 - The cottages being demolished (note the chalk quarry in the background).

1895 - Mr W. Pye
1922 - Mr J.W. Pye

Of course Ken has many memories of the farm:

"Dean Farm was the last farm in the area to use working horses. It was also the last farm to grow hops. The last of them being grubbed out in the early 1960s."

"It was mainly an arable farm, growing hops, oats, wheat, barley, potatoes, hay and root plants for animal feed. Bullocks were kept in the yard to produce the manure for the fields and for beef."

And from WWII: "The De Havilland Mosquito... developed engine trouble and was losing height rapidly. It tried to turn and land in Dean Valley, but its wings clipped the trees, which spun it into May's Wood [ahead of you],

The area where the Mosquito crashed (Dave May)



where it immediately burst into flames and exploded the ammunition. The farm workers... tried to rescue the pilot, but the intense heat and the ammunition firing off in all directions made it impossible."

Again, Mr Godding has researched details of this crash: the aircraft was from 21 Squadron based at Gravesend, the crash occurred on April 21st 1944.

Another WWII connection with this valley is that PLUTO (the 'pipeline under the ocean') runs through it. It was constructed to supply fuel for the D-Day landings.

From point L to point M

23. Carry on to the top of the hill, and reach a marked junction. Keep straight on, into May's Wood.

24. Walk uphill into the woodland. At a marked junction, turn left.

POINT M - MAY'S WOOD Woodland - ancient and modern

As you walk through May's Wood, compare the woodland on either side of this path. The two sides look quite different, don't they? The woodland on your left has been replanted with conifers (probably since WWII). This is known as Ancient Replanted Woodland. The woodland on your right has not been replanted and is known as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland. It is generally a better habitat for wildlife.



Wild flowers in May's Wood
(Dave May)

May's Wood features on a very old estate map of this area. To find out more, see the 'Whorne's Place' map section on page 15.

From point M to point N

25. Carry on through the wood. Come to a marked junction and turn left.

26. After a short distance you will reach a fork. Go right. Reach the edge of the wood and go through a metal kissing gate. Keep straight on, between two fields.

27. Pass a bench and come to a stile. Cross the stile near a beacon. (This is a superb viewpoint.)

28. Walk straight ahead, towards the church tower. Go downhill, reach the corner of the field and go through a wooden kissing gate. Turn left. You will quickly come to fork in the path - go right. You will then reach a marked junction, near a sign marking the entrance to Six Acre Wood - turn right. Go through the gate into the churchyard.

POINT N - CHURCHYARD AND RECTORY GARDEN Humanity's earliest chapter

Standing here in the churchyard of St Michael and All Angels church, it is clear that you are in a very special location within the parish. There has been a church here since at least the 9th century, as the Rector explains:

"The Saxons certainly had a church here, possibly of stone, possibly of wood. It was given by Ethelwulf, King of the West Saxons (839-855 AD) to the Bishop of Rochester."

A Personal Guide to Cuxton Parish Church by Rev. Roger Knight.

Such a long history is remarkable enough, but it seems that this has been an important place going back much farther than that. This part of the village - the churchyard, the garden of the rectory and a number of other gardens nearby - has been a hotbed of archaeological finds. Many of these are Roman:

Here in the churchyard, Roman bricks, masonry debris, pottery and tiles have been found, often during the digging of graves. In a nearby garden, Roman cremation urns, pottery fragments and a bronze buckle were found in the 1950s. A decade later, the skeleton of a Roman woman from the 2nd century AD was found in the same garden. The woman had been decapitated and her head placed between her knees with pottery vessels placed at her feet. This part of the Medway Valley is host to several Roman villa sites and it is likely that a Roman cemetery once occupied this part of the village, presumably serving a settlement of some kind.

But the Roman chapter is just half the story of this special area. Around 1900, beneath the drive of the

Rectory was found evidence of much, much earlier human activity - hand axes from the Palaeolithic period, the Old Stone Age. They were not chance finds - this area was, it seems, a local centre for the making of hand axes. Excavations in the Rectory garden in 1962 revealed the Stone Age equivalent of a hand axe factory, 400,000 years old! Over 200 axes were found, of a type known as Acheulean. This ordinary looking garden is the site of some of the earliest known human activity in the whole of Britain, and as such is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.



A flint tool found in this area of Cuxton - although from a later period than those found in the Rectory garden - the Neolithic. It was found by Dave May when the car park of the White Hart pub was excavated, and is now in Rochester Museum.

To complete our journey through Cuxton's past, let's look at the three photographs opposite. They were all taken by Ken Law, the first two in 1961, the third in 2005. They show how Cuxton has grown in that period, and there is no doubt that the landscape of the village has changed a great deal in the lifetime of many local people. But this period is just the last paragraph in a story that started in the most distant reaches of human prehistory. It is perhaps ironic that, when taking these photographs, Ken was standing in

the Rectory garden, a place which has shown us that humans have been changing the landscape of Cuxton for hundreds of thousands of years.



From point N to Start

29. Cross the churchyard, and turn left, away from the church, onto a metalled drive. Follow this drive back to the main road and turn left. Follow the main road back to the White Hart pub and turn right for the station.

Special woodlands

Glance at any map of this area and you will quickly see that Cuxton is a well-wooded parish. Much of this woodland is termed 'ancient', but what does this mean?

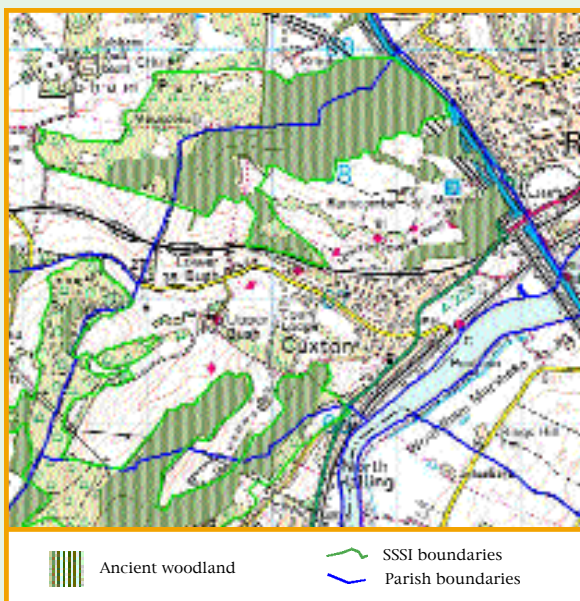
"An ancient woodland is one that has existed since at least 1600 AD, and possibly much longer. Prior to this date, planting of woodland was very uncommon which suggests that if a wood was present in 1600 it is likely to have been there for some time previously, and may be a remnant of the original 'wildwood' which once covered most of Britain..."
Guidelines for Identifying Ancient Woodland - leaflet produced by English Nature.

You can find clues about whether a woodland is ancient by looking at its plants. Certain plants are known as 'ancient woodland indicators' - if a number of them can be found in a wood, that is evidence for it being ancient. Local resident Elizabeth Summers recorded a number of these plants in her nature diaries. In May's Wood she recorded wood anemone, ramsons (wild garlic), sanicle, bluebells, and early purple orchids. In North Wood she found primroses.

Conservationists regard ancient woodland as the closest thing to 'natural' woodland that we have in the managed landscapes of Britain. Those with rare habitats and species are often protected. Cuxton is fortunate in that many of its ancient woodlands are part of two Sites of Special Scientific Interest or SSSIs. SSSIs are like the premier league of wild places - the best in the country - and protected by law.

The map above shows which woodlands in the Cuxton area are ancient and which are SSSIs.

Many ancient woodlands in Kent have a long history of management by coppicing. This is the traditional practice of regularly cutting small areas of trees down to a stump and letting them re-grow as many thin stems. This provided a renewable source of wood for a wide range of uses, including fencing, firewood and construction materials. Coppicing also benefits wild flowers, butterflies and dormice.



 Ancient woodland
 SSSI boundaries
 Parish boundaries

Whorne's Place map

In 2005, Medway Council bought a very special map. It dates from the 17th century and is a plan of Whorne's Place - a lost estate on the banks of the Medway. Of the Whorne's Place buildings, only a granary converted into a house remains.

Stephen Dixon of the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre tells us more:

"The map was drawn in 1670 by Robert Felgate for the estate owner, Sir John Marsham... It is hand-drawn and coloured on parchment... It is important because it includes a detailed and presumably accurate block plan of the buildings of Whorne's Place, now sadly lost..."

"The estate takes its name from either Sir William Whorne, lord mayor of London in 1487 or a Robert Whorne of about the same date. Between Whorne's day and Marsham's acquisition of the estate it was owned by the Leveson family. In 1808 the estate passed into the hands of the earls of Darley of Cobham Hall and in the 20th century was partly broken up into small parcels of land for residential development. The date is early for estate plans of the Medway area... The plan makes it possible to visualise and understand the geography and land use of the area in the late 17th century prior to the modern industrial age."



The surviving granary from the rear c.1976 (Dave May).



Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre (DE1016)

A comparison of the plan with a modern map reveals a few surprises. The layout of woodlands is remarkably similar and some field boundaries have not changed in over 400 years. The area marked 'The Warren' is still known by that name. The plan also shows ancient tracks that still exist, including the route of the North Downs Way. The footpath through May's Wood is romantically labelled 'The Way Through the Woods', while the road which is now the A228 is simply called 'The Way'. Whorne's Place itself may have gone, but the land that was the estate has not changed as much as one would expect.

The map was purchased by Medway Council with contributions from Cuxton Parish Council and the Lost Landscapes Project.

The Whorne's Place map

(Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre, Director of Community Services, Medway Council).

Contributors

We would like to thank the following contributors to this booklet (in alphabetical order):

Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme
Cuxton Five-O Club
Cuxton Countryside Group
Stephen Dixon (Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre)
Mr Godding
Rev. Roger Knight
Ken Law
Dave May
Adam Single (Kent County Council Heritage Team)
Elizabeth Summers

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This booklet was edited and designed by Clarity Interpretation (01303 249501 clarity.interpretation@virgin.net).

Useful information

This circular route is one of a series of Lost Landscapes Heritage Trails that have been developed in the following parishes along the North Downs: Detling, Thurnham, Hollingbourne, Charing, Chilham and Chartham.

For further information about Lost Landscapes and walking opportunities along the North Downs Way visit www.nationaltrail.co.uk/northdowns or e-mail northdownsway@kent.gov.uk or telephone the Trail Office on 01622 221525.

The Countryside Code.

Be safe - plan ahead and follow arrows or signs
Leave gates and property as you find them
Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
Keep dogs under close control
Consider other people

Waymarking

During your walk you will see arrows marking various public rights of way:

-  Footpath (on foot only)
-  Bridleway (on foot, horseback or pedal cycle)
-  Byway (all traffic)

In the Cuxton area you may also see other coloured waymarkers (black, brown and green) for some local routes. For a booklet on these routes contact Medway Council (contact details below) and ask about the Circular Walks Around Cuxton and Halling booklet.

Medway Council has a duty to protect, maintain and record public rights of way in the Cuxton area. If you encounter any problems on the route please write to Medway Council, Development and Environment Department, Front Line Task Force, Compass Centre, Pembroke, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4YH or e-mail customer.services@medway.gov.uk or telephone 01634 333333.

